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## Venerable Senators or Municipal Bureaucrats? The Beginnings of the Transformation of the Estate of Burghers at the Turn of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries\*

This essay offers a socio-historical analysis of the urban elite of the city of Sopron in Western Hungary as a paradigmatic example of the changes that were implemented in municipal administration at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries to meet the demands of the centralized state. It examines the process whereby the centralized state began to assert its influence in municipal affairs in the interests of reestablishing and strengthening the cities as sources of tax revenue and furthering the reinstatement of Catholicism. Alongside the confessional shifts that took place, the distinctive social characteristics of the leading urban elite also changed: because of the small number of educated Catholics among the burgesses, an increasing number of state officials and educated servants who earlier had been in the service of owners of large estates rose to prominent positions in municipal administration. Because of the expectations of the state regarding professional qualifications and the dependence on the central offices, the roles of the municipal officials were increasingly intertwined with the affairs of public administration. They came to be the precursors to the so-called “*honorácior*” stratum, a social class of intellectuals and civil servants who played a prominent role in the growth of a new bureaucracy in the nineteenth century.

### *Public Administration and Municipal Politics: European Trends*

The consolidation of the state and the spread of public administration were both fundamental features of the early modern era in Europe. The machinery of the state increasingly strove to extend its reach into the everyday lives of an ever broader social spectrum and to exert an ever larger influence. This tendency involved the introduction by the centralized and later absolutist state of regulations regarding questions that earlier had been decided by the feudal estates and their representatives. One thinks perhaps first and foremost of questions concerning the relationship between serfs and feudal lords or even issues related to religion, medicine, the poor, etc., all of which came increasingly

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under the purview of the state in the eighteenth century. Military affairs and the financing of national defense, which increasingly became the prerogative of the state, developed under the authority of the absolute monarch, and a process of centralization was underway in other areas of state power that was part and parcel of the new exercise of state control.<sup>1</sup> Taxation, the administration of justice, the tasks entrusted to various administrative bodies, etc. became the prerogative of the administration of the centralized state, which was invested with legitimacy and authority. Economic history designates this phenomenon as the rise of the fiscal state, a term that nicely indicates the purely economic, financial relationship between the primary motivations and the solutions that were adopted. These changes exerted an influence on the cities that were under the control of the monarch. The income of the residents of cities (which included ever increasing tax revenues, income from commerce and trade, etc.) constituted an ever larger share of state revenues. Thus the state and the middle class burgesses were bound by ever more common interests.<sup>2</sup> According to Fernand Braudel, the large urban communities came into being specifically because of this: “this belated, sudden development would have been unimaginable without the emergence of the states [as legal entities].” The large urban communities played the role of “producers” of the modern state, but the state was at the same time the political body that brought them into being.<sup>3</sup>

Municipal governments, which were founded on the feudal orders, underwent significant changes as a consequence of these developments. Since the cities in almost every country of feudal Europe were considerably more dependant on the sovereigns than the other feudal orders (which may have

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1 Ronald G. Asch and Heinz Duchhardt, eds., *Der Absolutismus – ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550–1700)* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau, 1996); Ronald G. Asch, “Kriegsfinanzierung, Staatsbildung und ständische Ordnung im Westeuropa im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert,” *Historisches Zeitschrift* 268 (1999): 635–71; Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992); Alwin Hanschmidt, “Zur Armenpolizei und Armenversorgung in der Stadt Münster im 17. Jahrhundert,” in *Städtisches Gesundheits- und Fürsorgewesen vor 1800*, ed. Peter Johanek (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 225–41.

2 Richard Bonney, ed., *The rise of the fiscal state in Europe c. 1200–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Marjolein C. ’t Hart, *The making of a bourgeois state. War, politics and finance during the Dutch revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Patrick K. O’ Brien and Philip A. Hunt, “The Rise of a Fiscal State in England, 1485–1815,” *Historical Research* 66, no. 160 (1993): 129–76; Simonetta Cavaciocchi, ed., *La fiscalità nell’economia europea sec. XIII–XVIII: Atti della “Trentanovesima settimana di studi,” 22–26 aprile 2007* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2008).

3 Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe–XVIIIe siècle. 1. Les structures du quotidien. Le possible et l’impossible* [Nouv. éd.]. (Paris: Colin, 1979), 463.

derived from their belated formation of an estate), at the outset these measures affected them the most. The secondary literature speaks of the bureaucratization of the cities of the Holy Roman Empire in the seventeenth century and their incorporation into the administrative systems of the centralized state, even (and here the terminology may be a bit overstated) their “nationalization.”<sup>4</sup> In the urban communities of the Kingdom of France, by the seventeenth century the municipal leaders rather appeared as the representatives of the centralized state than freely elected officers of the cities themselves. Thus as a consequence of the changes that took place in state administration and municipal politics, by the eighteenth century insular city life was a thing of the past, displaced by a new form of urban community that was an integral part of the modern state and was growing with stunning speed.<sup>5</sup>

### *New Features of City Politics in Hungary*

The changes that took place in municipal politics in Hungary were strongly dependent on the relationships between the cities and the central government and feudal estates, as well as the relationship between the feudal estates and the Habsburg government. In this respect dramatic shifts took place over the course of the sixteenth century. True, the medieval Hungarian Kingdom had fallen and from the perspectives of the military and finance the country had become a strongly centralized part of the Habsburg Monarchy, but it nonetheless remained

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4 On the notion of the “nationalization” of the cities see Klaus Gerteis, *Die deutschen Städte in der frühen Neuzeit. Zur Vorgeschichte der “bürgerlichen Welt”* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986), 73–80; Nicolas Rügg, *Im Dienst von Stadt und Staat. Der Rat der Stadt Herford und die preussische Zentralverwaltung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

5 Charles Tilly and Wim Blockmans, *Cities and the rise of states in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder, Coloua: Westview Press, 1994); Alexander Cowan, *Urban Europe 1500–1700* (London: Arnold, 1998); Thomas Riis and Poul Strømstad, eds., *Le pouvoir central et les villes en Europe du XVe siècle aux débuts de la révolution industrielle: Actes du colloque de la Commission internationale pour l'histoire des villes au Danemark, Copenhague 1976* (Copenhagen, Comité danois pour l'histoire des villes, 1978); Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban politics in early modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2000); Mathieu Marraud, *De la ville à l'État, la bourgeoisie parisienne, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009); Giorgio Chittolini, “Städte und Regionalstaaten in Mittel- und Oberitalien zwischen spätem Mittelalter und früherer Neuzeit,” in *Res Publica. Bürgerschaft in Stadt und Staat. Tagung der Vereinigung für Verfassungsgeschichte in Hofgeismar am 30./31. März 1987*, *Der Staat* Beiheft 8 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1988), 179–200; Otto Brunner, “Souveränitätsproblem und Sozialstruktur in den deutschen Reichsstädten der früheren Neuzeit,” *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, no. 50 (1953): 329–60; Peter Blickle, Rosi Fuhrmann, and Andreas Würgler, *Gemeinde und Staat im Alten Europa* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1998); Rudolf Schlögl and Jan Marco Sawilla, eds., *Urban Elections and Decision-Making in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

a feudal monarchy with an influential and sizeable political elite. Following the defeat of the Hungarian army at the battle of Mohács in 1526, the Habsburg political, military, and economic leaders and the Hungarian estates realized that in the interests of defending the monarchy and the Hungarian Kingdom they would be compelled to arrive at compromises. This is why the Hungarian estates in Hungary enjoyed considerably more political power, at least within the country, than the estates in the other provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy. The feudal governments in Hungary (the counties or boroughs and the free royal cities) became stronger and more rigid in the exercise of their authorities, and domestic political life and the oversight of the administration of justice remained in the hands of the estates. As a result, the feudal estates in Hungary remained more autonomous and powerful than the estates of the rest of the Habsburg lands.<sup>6</sup>

Under these political circumstances, settlements that had the status of so-called free royal cities were able to assert their rights and pursue endeavors that promoted their political interests. These cities were completely independent, and as early as the fifteenth century possessed rights of local government and administration independent of the court.<sup>7</sup> As of the early decades of the sixteenth century the free royal cities enjoyed increasingly strong feudal rights. They were always invited to national assemblies and they were able to vote individually in the lower house. Their local administrative bodies remained unimpaired in spite of the fact that members of the nobility and, in the case of some cities, the military were moving into the cities and putting tension on this remnant of medieval governance.<sup>8</sup> For the centralizing state, however, as of the first decades of the seventeenth century, of the feudal orders it was precisely the free royal cities that represented the first rung on the ladder of intervention in municipal administration. The cities had feudal rights, but they did not have any significant political influence. From the perspective of jurisdiction and authority, the monarch had considerably more direct say in the affairs of the free royal cities. Acting very much like a feudal lord, as of the early

6 Géza Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*, Hungarian Studies Series 18 (New York: Boulder, 2009).

7 Jenő Szűcs, “Das Städtewesen in Ungarn im XV–XVII. Jh.,” in *La Renaissance et la Réformation en Pologne et en Hongrie, 1450–1650*, ed. György Székely and Erik Fügedi, *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 53. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1963), 97–164; András Kubinyi, “Der ungarische König und seine Städte im 14. und am Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Stadt und Stadtherr im 14. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungen und Funktionen*, ed. Wilhelm Rausch, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Städte Mitteleuropas* 2 (Linz/Donau: Österreichischer Arbeitskreis für Stadtgeschichtsforschung, 1974), 193–220.

8 István H. Németh, *Várospolitika és gazdaságpolitika a 16–17. századi Magyarországon* [City Politics and Economic Policy in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Hungary] (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2004).

seventeenth century the monarch demanded the cities pay yearly property taxes (*census*). The special military tax (*taxa*), on which votes were held in the national assemblies, was not imposed on the basis of the taxation quota agreed to by the estates, but rather was determined by the organs of central finance. Indeed as of the 1630s the centralized government was able to increase the number of years in which such taxes were to be paid without the consent of the national assembly.<sup>9</sup>

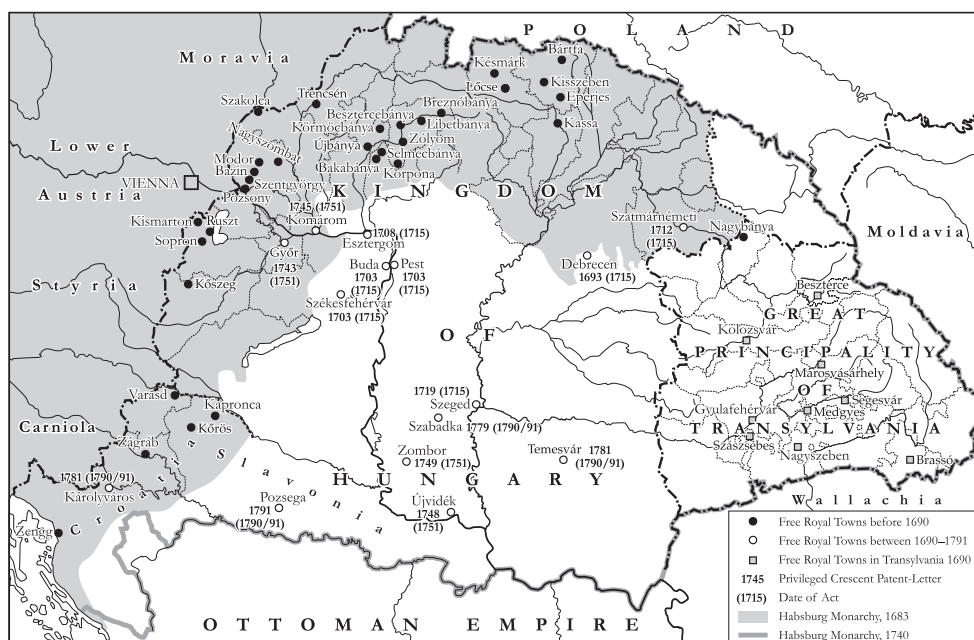


Figure 1. Free royal cities in the Kingdom of Hungary, 17–18<sup>th</sup> centuries

The difference in the relationship between the Hungarian Kingdom and the Habsburg Monarchy on the one hand and the Monarchy and the other Austrian realms on the other was typified by the relationship between the centralized state administration and the cities. As early as the Middle Ages, in the cities of the Austrian lands the magistrates were people representing the interests of the Austrian princes. Commissioners who had been named by the monarch participated in the municipal elections in the Austrian provinces, initially in order to ensure that a municipal officer (a so-called Eidkommissar) took an oath of allegiance. At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and later,

9 István H. Németh, "Die finanziellen Auswirkungen der osmanischen Expansion auf die Städteentwicklung in Ungarn," in *La Fiscalità nell'economia europea sec. XIII–XVIII – Fiscal Systems in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Century*, ed. Cavaciocchi Simonetta (Florence: Florence University Press, 2008), 771–80.

following a brief interlude, as of 1625), the role of the commissioners changed. Their primary task became to exercise their influence on the municipal officers and to oversee the administration of city (a so-called Wahlkommissar).<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the monarch did not begin to intervene in the local administration of the free royal cities of Hungary until the last third of the seventeenth century. The last third of the seventeenth century constituted a turning point from the perspective of city politics in Hungary. Following the defeat of an uprising by the estates against the Habsburg rulers (1670–1671), the monarchy began to keep a more watchful eye on the cities and implement measures to oversee their administration. The steps that were taken were by no means unfamiliar in other states of Europe, but the ideology and methods that had prevailed in the Austrian lands served as a kind of model, methods that first were introduced in 1672 on a somewhat sporadic basis, but later, after 1690, were adopted in (or rather forced on) each of the free royal cities of Hungary.

There were various reasons underlying the efforts on the part of the centralized state to intervene in municipal affairs. One of the factors, a movement that has often been the subject of study, was the Counter-Reformation, one of the goals of which was to ensure that the leaders of the cities were Catholic, if not exclusively then at least for the most part.<sup>11</sup> This was part of the religious policies adopted by the Habsburg government in the Czech and Austrian hereditary provinces, just as it was part of the policies pursued by states across Europe at the time. In the seventeenth century the notion of “one state, one religion” was essentially a uniformly accepted principle in all the states of Europe in which there were efforts to establish a centralized or absolutist government.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Karl Gutkas, “Das Städtewesen des österreichischen Donauländer und der Steiermark im 14. Jahrhundert,” in *Stadt und Stadtherr im 14. Jahrhundert. Entwicklungen und Funktionen*, ed. Wilhelm Rausch, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Städte Mitteleuropas 2 (Linz/Donau: Österreichischer Arbeitskreis für Stadtgeschichtsforschung, 1972), 234–37; Otto Brunner, “Städtische Selbstregierung und neuzeitlicher Verwaltungsstaat in Österreich,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 6 (1955): 221–49; Martin Scheutz, “Compromise and Shake Hands. The Town Council, Authority and Urban Stability in Eighteenth-Century Austrian Small Towns,” *Urban History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 51–63; Franz Baltzarek, “Die Stadtordnung des Ferdinands I. und die städtische Autonomie im 16. Jahrhundert,” in *Wien an der Schwelle der Neuzeit*, ed. Franz Baltzarek et al. (Vienna: Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv, 1974), 31–43.

11 Szűcs, “Das Städtewesen in Ungarn,” Cf. István H. Németh, “Európska doktrína alebo uhorská špecialita?” [A European Doctrine or a Hungarian Specialty?], *Historický Časopis* 57, no. 4 (2009): 641–58.

12 Ernst Hinrichs, “Abschied vom Absolutismus. Eine Antwort auf Nicholas Henshall,” in *Der Absolutismus – ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West- und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550–1700)* (Köln–Vienna–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 353–71; Rudolf Vierhaus, *Staaten und Stände. Vom westfälischen bis zum Hubertusbürger Frieden 1648–1763* (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1984), 15–38.



Until this point, however, the measures that had been adopted by the Habsburgs in order to reassert Catholicism had not affected the municipal governments directly. Among the aristocracy, the number of converts grew. As of the second decade of the century positions in state offices were given almost exclusively to Catholics, but forceful measures to compel conversion to Catholicism as part of an effort spearheaded by the state and implemented with the use of organs of public administration only began to be adopted after 1670.<sup>13</sup> The election commissioners were charged with the task of ensuring that in local elections Catholics win positions in the municipal governments, but as was the case in the Austrian provinces, they also had to oversee other spheres more closely connected with local administration.<sup>14</sup> On the occasion of the annual elections of new officers, the commissioners had to prepare detailed surveys of the cities that touched on almost every aspect of public life. They had to inspect the municipal account books and had to be familiar with the general conditions prevailing in the cities. Their reports included descriptions of the composition of the cities from a religious (confessional) perspective, the states of the churches, and the religious lives of the churchgoers, but also general descriptions of the burgesses of the cities, the municipal administration, the state of the public buildings, the ordinances regarding taxation, and in general every aspect of the local administration.<sup>15</sup>

The considerations that influenced the commissioners in their decisions to delegate new members to the city councils would have improved the local economies and local administration, rendering them more transparent, since knowledge of economics and law was one of the qualifications that was given particular emphasis in their instructions (alongside belonging to the Catholic

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13 Katalin Péter, "The Struggle for Protestant Religious Liberty at the 1646–47 Diet in Hungary," in *Crown, Church and Estates. Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Robert John Weston Evans and Trevor V. Thomas, Studies in Russia and East Europe (London: Macmillan in association with the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies University of London, 1994), 261–68; Joachim Bahlcke, *Konfessionalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa. Wirkungen des religiösen Wandels im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert in Staat, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999); Josef Hrdlička, "Die (Re-)Katholisierung lokaler Amtsträger in Böhmen. Konfession oder Disziplin?" in *Staatsmacht und Seelenheil. Gegenreformation und Geheimprotestantismus in der Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. Rudolf Leeb, Susanne Claudine Pils, and Thomas Winkelbauer, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 47 (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2007), 357–66.

14 Scheutz, "Compromise and Shake Hands."

15 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, Hoffinanz Ungarn (=HKA HFU) RN 360. December 1693. fol. 365–72. December 15, 1690.

Church, of course).<sup>16</sup> There was a simple reason to make local administration more effective: the state, which was assuming more and more responsibilities, needed more income, but as of roughly 1625 the cities not only did not provide the central state with more revenues, but even accrued enormous debts in unpaid taxes. The ability of the city burgesses in Hungary to pay taxes dropped dramatically in the seventeenth century, presumably at least in part as a consequence of the European war. The pressures on the state to collect taxes, however, were growing because of the increasing costs of war. As a result, the cities were compelled to take out loans. By the end of the century the cities had accrued debts of more than 10,000 to 15,000 forint, and by the early eighteenth century these debts had doubled and in some cases quadrupled. Sopron, for instance, had remarkably high debts. The 200,000 forint debt it had accrued by the end of the seventeenth century was ten times the city's income.<sup>17</sup>

The centralized state was able to exercise continuous control over two important areas of municipal government that earlier had been essentially free of exterior influence, namely the composition of the municipal council and state supervision and reform of the local economy. The surrender of these two aspects of local governance, the two most important privileges enjoyed by the cities, meant the end of city life as it had been known from the Middle Ages. The first step in this process came with the efforts of the monarchs to change the religious (confessional) composition of the councils (which for the most part were Lutherans) and the community of elected officials and as of the second half of the seventeenth century to delegate as many trustworthy Catholics as possible to the bodies of municipal government.<sup>18</sup> Twenty-five years later the cameralistic commissioners who had been delegated to the cities ensured that at least half of the people to be elected to positions in the leading elite were Catholic. They also saw to it that the positions of magistrate and notary were filled by people they considered trustworthy. The system by which the leading

16 For an example see Rügge, *Im Dienst von Stadt und Staat*, 70–108.

17 Anton Špiesz, *Slobodné kráľovské mestá na Slovensku v rokoch 1680–1780* [The Free Royal Cities in Slovakia between 1680 and 1780] (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1983); István H. Németh, “Die finanziellen Auswirkungen,” 771–80, and Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) [Hungarian National Archives] Kincstári Szervek, Magyar Kamara Archivuma Miscellanea (E 210) Civitatensia 15. No. 9; MNL OL Kincstári Levéltárak, Magyar Kamara Regisztratúrája E 34 (Protocollum diversarum relationum super restaurationibus liberarum regiarum civitatum) (=E 34 [prot. rest. civ.]) 406, 495.

18 Felhő Ibolya, “A szabad királyi városok és a Magyar Kamara a XVII. században” [The Free Royal Cities and the Hungarian Chamber in the Seventeenth Century], *Levéltári Közlemények* 24 (1946): 209–67.



officers and governing bodies were assured their legitimacy changed as well. Earlier, legitimacy had derived directly from the votes of the burgesses, but by the last third of the seventeenth-century officers were invested in their offices by a commissioner representing the monarch.<sup>19</sup>

It was not always easy, however, to find the right person for the goals set by the state. Certainly the letters sent by the king on the occasion of a local election stipulated that city officers belong to the Catholic Church, own property (*benepossessionatus*), and possess the necessary qualifications (*qualificatus*).<sup>20</sup> However, because of the pace with which the state sought to implement changes, often someone without the necessary training or social status found himself serving as an officer in a position of no small importance.<sup>21</sup> We have very little in the way of reliable sources, however, regarding the actual competence of the people who were elected to public offices in the last two-and-a-half decades of the seventeenth century or the changes that took place in municipal administration as a consequence of the shifts. In what follows, I attempt to offer a rough picture of these changes and the consequences they had for city politics and society. Taking prevailing trends across Europe into consideration, I present these processes through an analysis of the urban elite of the city of Sopron in western Hungary. I compare tendencies in Sopron with social phenomena in other cities.<sup>22</sup> This social-historical analysis is intended to offer an answer to

19 István H. Németh, "Pre-Modern State Urban Policy at a Turning Point in the Kingdom of Hungary. The Elections to the Town Council," in *Urban Elections and Decision Making in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Schlögl Rudolf (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 276–99.

20 "...necessarium valde et expediens iudicavimus, ut quandoquidem catholica orthodoxa per Dei gratiam fides, magnum illic incrementum sumpsisse, frequentesque catholicae bene qualificatae, ad gerenda senatoria, et quaelibet alia inter vos consueta officia, idoneae personae inveniri comperiantur." Archiv Mesta Košice, [Archives of the City of Košice] Schwartzbachiana No. 9277, Vienna, 16 December 1674. See Ibid., No. 9332, Bratislava, 19 June 1675; No. 9405, Košice, 7 January 1676; No. 9475, Vienna, 24 December 1677; No. 9476, Bratislava, 2 January 1677; No. 11008, Vienna, 2 December 1696.

21 Szűcs, "Das Städtewesen in Ungarn," 156; Špiesz, *Slobodné kráľovské mestá na Slovensku v rokoch 1680–1780*, 29–46; Anton Špiesz, "Der Wiener Hof und die Städte in Ungarn in den Jahren 1681–1780," in *Die Städte Mitteleuropas*, 83–95; Anton Špiesz, "Rekatolizácia na Slovensku v mestách v rokoch 1681–1781," [The Reestablishment of Catholicism in the Cities between 1681–1781], *Historický Časopis* 39 (1991): 588–612; Marie Marečková, "Politická autonómie a vnútorná samospráva východoslovenských svobodných kráľovských miest v 17. storočí," [The Political Autonomy of the Cities of Eastern Slovakia], *Historický Časopis* 41 (1993): 543–550; István H. Németh, "Európska doktrína."

22 István H. Németh, "Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői? A központosuló várospolitikai hatások a soproni politikai elit átvételéről" [Servants of the State or Representatives of the City], *Soproni Szemle* 61 (2007): 125–41; István H. Németh, *Kassa szabad királyi város archontológiája. Bírák, külső és belső tanács (1500–1700)* [Archontology of the Free Royal City of Košice. Magistrates and the Outer and Inner Council (1500–1700)], Fons Könyvek 3 (Budapest: Szentpétery Imre Alapítvány, 2006).

the following question: what changes did the new goals and aspirations of the state bring about in the composition of the urban elites? I also consider the question of whether the elite that developed over the course of this period can be considered a precursor to the new “honorácior” social stratum that evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a new class of intellectuals and civil servants.

### *Expertise, Competence, and Stable Social Roots: the Leading Lutheran Elite*

Even the royal commissioners, who clearly could be accused of bias in favor of Catholics, could not have questioned the expertise and qualifications of the Lutheran elite of the cities. Before the abovementioned changes in urban policy took place, the vast majority of the city leaders were Lutheran, and there were no Catholic members of the municipal councils virtually anywhere. A detailed study of the leading elite confirms their competency, which was acknowledged and recognized by the cameralistic commissioners as well. The majority of the leaders either had been university students at one point or had completed university studies.<sup>23</sup> In addition to their education, they also belonged to the upper classes of the city burgesses. They were connected by a very strong network of family relationships. In this essay I focus primarily on the elite of the city of Sopron, since the data regarding the composition of the population of this city are accurate and detailed. An analysis of their social networks reveals that two or three families became the center of a larger network. It would not be an overstatement to say that almost all of the Lutheran town leaders were related to these families in some way. The families forming the core center were stable and secure members of the narrow circle of burgesses who occupied the most important official positions. The homes of the members of the Lutheran elite were found on the most important streets of the city, a sign of their social prestige.

In the case of the Lutherans who came to power after 1670 one notes a shift in the physical focal point of the community, as they began to assemble around the Lutheran school, but this did not exert much influence on the main tendencies. In general, members of the Lutheran community who held public

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23 For the reports of the commissioners see: MNL OL E 34 (prot. rest. civ.) 246. On the qualifications and education of the burgesses see: H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?” 130.

office owned homes within the city walls.<sup>24</sup> Almost all of them had acquired the status of nobleman, a clear sign of their prominence and also an indication that as burgesses who held noble titles they were among the most recognized people of the urban community. In addition to the title of nobility, most of them also obtained the rank of court “familiaris” (in Latin, *familiaris aulicae*; “familiaris” is a social rank specific to Hungarian feudalism). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this title was given primarily to those who performed official, intellectual or economic roles. The goal was to bring the Hungarian gentry, burgesses and the emerging class of civil servants (which thanks to the reforms that had been implemented was increasingly influential) into the group that enjoyed the patronage of the monarch and effectively governed the Hungarian Kingdom in coordination with the court. It is therefore no surprise that some of the Lutheran citizens who obtained the title of familiaris had proof of having obtained a doctorate in law.<sup>25</sup> The recipients were members of the group that undertook a wide range of tasks in central finance management offices, thereby putting their education to use. Their presence in government bodies also proves that members of the intellectual class (which was small in number) were very sought after, which far from decreasing the role of the cities in the counties or the state on the contrary increased the prestige of the burgesses and the importance of the urban communities.<sup>26</sup>

24 Ferenc Dávid, *Sopron belvárosának házai és háztulajdonosai, 1488–1939* [The Homes and Homeowners of the Inner City of Sopron] (Sopron: The Sopron Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron County, 2008).

25 Szűcs, “Das Städtewesen in Ungarn.”; Zsuzsanna J. Újváry, “Egy kereskedőcsalád metamorfózisa” [The Transformation of a Family of Tradesmen], in *Óra, szablya, nyoszolya* [Clock, Sword, Bed], ed. Vera Zimányi (Budapest: Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1994), 33–85; Zsuzsanna J. Újváry, “Polgár vagy nemes?” [Burgess or Nobleman?], in *Ezredforduló – századforduló – hetvenedik évforduló. Ünnepi tanulmányok Zimányi Vera tiszteletére* [Turn of the Millennium, Turn of the Century, Seventeenth Anniversary. Essays in Honor of Vera Zimányi], ed. Zsuzsanna J. Újváry (Piliscsaba: Faculty of the Humanities, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2001), 395–426; István H. Németh, *Várospolitika* vol. 1, 439–72; István H. Németh, “Polgár vagy nemes? A városok nemesi rendű lakosainak problematikája a felső-magyarországi városszövetség tevékenysége tükrében” [Burgess or Nobleman? The Complexities of the City Dwellers with Titles of Nobility from the Perspective of the Activities of the City Administration in Upper Hungary], *Korall* 9 (2002): 79–106; István H. Németh, “Špachta v mestách – prirodzený proces alebo negatívny jav?” [Noblemen in the Cities—a Natural Process, or Unfortunate Trend], *Forum Historiae*, no. 2 (2008). On the familiaris aulicae: Jenő Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok, 1535–1848* [Burgess Families of Sopron, 1535–1848] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), no. 10448; Zsuzsanna Vissi et al., *Libri Regii – Királyi Könyvek, 1527–1918* [Libri Regii – Royal Books] (Budapest: Hungarian National Archives, 2006), 7.339, 10.17. On the title of familiaris aulicae: Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy*, 75.

26 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?” 130–31.

The above characteristics were as typical of the Lutheran municipal elite that controlled urban administrations following the shift in city politics at the end of the seventeenth century as they had been of their predecessors. It is important to note, however, that qualifications and expertise had been given more emphasis by that time (in part in order to ensure that needs of the state be met).<sup>27</sup> The



Figure 2. The coat of arms of the Poch family.

Source: Lutheran Cemetery,  
Museum of Sopron



Figure 3. The coat of arms on the tombstone  
of Ferdinand Dobner.

Source: Lutheran Cemetery, Museum of Sopron

Lutherans who occupied the most important positions in cities (in Sopron this meant the Preiniger, Poch, Dobner, and Wohlmuth families) had completed studies at schools of law (for example at the universities of Strassburg or Jena).<sup>28</sup> Many members of the next two generations were given noble titles and more prominent positions.

This raises the question, if the state considered members of the Lutheran communities enemies, why did it bestow on them not only noble titles, but also the ranks of court familiaris and even baron? The vast majority of those who were elevated to noble rank got their titles following the uprisings, when the government was attempting to take steps in order to promote consolidation. The siege of Vienna (1683) and the reoccupation campaigns that followed (1683–1699) accelerated the process. During this period, many members of the urban Lutheran elite were raised to noble rank, and received special privileges, including immunity to state taxes and the burdens of war. Leopold Natl was the first burgher to be given the title of baron. In the official municipal records tenure of office in the municipal administrations is indicated as a merit, an

27 H. Németh, “Pre-Modern State Urban Policy,” 290–91; István H. Németh, “Zmeny v správe miest” [Urban Administration at a Turning Point], in *Kapitoly z dejín Bratislavy*, eds. Gábor Czoch, Aranka Kocsis, and Árpád Tóth (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2006), 229–47.

28 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői?” 130–32.

indication of the shift in the relationship between the state and the city offices. Municipal officers had become servants of the centralized state.<sup>29</sup>

It would be rash to draw far-reaching conclusions on the basis of the data below, but two tendencies merit mention, the ennobling of the Lutheran city elite and the legal education so many of the members of this elite had. As of the last decades of the seventeenth century the royal commissioners almost always preferred to choose municipal leaders on the basis of their qualifications instead of selecting Catholics who lacked the necessary education, in spite of the fact that they (the commissioners) had been charged with the task of ensuring that Catholics rise to positions of prominence in city administration. Was this process analogous to the one mentioned earlier in the presentation of the European tendencies of the period? Did the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries bear witness to the initial stages of the process of the creation of an educated, professional municipal leadership in Hungary, a new municipal leadership that had the necessary knowledge of law and economics (in part because this was one of the goals of the Vienna court) and that therefore made it possible to govern the cities more effectively and more “bureaucratically”? One can only confirm the causal interrelationships I have sketched here, however, if one also considers the backgrounds of the Catholic members of the municipal administrations, the people who were helped to positions of influence by the cameralistic commissioners.

### *Strangers at the Forefront of Municipal Administration*

In the first few years following their arrival in the cities, the royal commissioners (mostly cameralistic civil servants) who were sent to the urban settlements in the last three decades of the seventeenth century installed their civil servant colleagues, the postmaster and custom-house officer of the given city, in their offices. This took place in all of the free royal cities in which there was a Lutheran majority, cities in which it was impossible to find suitable Catholics in order to fill these important positions. Where there were not enough cameralistic officers, they had reliable propertied Catholic noblemen elected to the council.<sup>30</sup> This is how the local toll-collector became the mayor and magistrate of Sopron (and two years later a member of the nobility). The local chronicler simply referred

29 Ibid., 132–133. On the royal letters of privilege see: Vissi et al., *Libri Regii – Királyi Könyvek*, 10.17., 17.9., 17.104., 18.172., 24.476.

30 Károly Heimler, *Payr György és Payr Mihály krónikája, 1584–1700* [The Chronicle of György Payr and Mihály Payr] (Sopron 1942), 69–70.

to him as a “stranger.”<sup>31</sup> In the case of the city of Kassa (present-day Košice in Slovakia, known as Kaschau in German), which was the seat of the police force of Upper Hungary, János Fodor, the toll-collector of the city of Újhely and the judge advocate of the police of Upper Hungary, and then later János Kinisy, a former soldier and later himself toll-collector, were the guarantee in the eyes of the commissioners of the Szepes Chamber that the measures they sought to implement would be executed in accordance with their original intentions.<sup>32</sup> The fact that they were given these positions is remarkable, because they were strangers with no local family or economic ties. The new government officers usually did not even have the status of burgess. They obtained it only after having been elected to their positions.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that Hungarian noblemen often chose to move to free royal cities and even went so far as to become burgesses,<sup>34</sup> the majority of the people who as strangers to the communities rose to prominence in the cities did not own property in the inner city (unlike the Lutherans), but lived rather in the outer city, beyond the city walls.<sup>35</sup> Indeed in some cases they owned nothing whatsoever within the boundaries of the city. This is a clear indication that these people did not belong to the elite layer of the Sopron burgesses, neither from a social nor an economic perspective.<sup>36</sup>

While the cameralistic civil servants who rose to the fore in the cities had barely any relationship with the local burgesses and therefore governed the towns as complete strangers, their professional competence could not be thrown into question, for they had a solid knowledge of economics and law. Their role, however, was passing. After a transitional period, the cameralistic commissioners strove to find new leaders for the cities who were tied to the given community, but who as Catholics had been excluded from power.

31 Ibid., 74; Iván Paur, “Csányi János magyar krónikája, 1670–1704” [János Csányi’s Hungarian Chronicle, 1670–1704], *Magyar Történelmi Tár* 5 (1858): 23.

32 On János Fodor see: HKA HFU RN 222, August 1666, fols 248–88.; RN 233, June 1671, fols 101–7; MNL OL Kincstári Levéltárak, Magyar Kamara Levéltára [Archives of the Treasury, Archives of the Hungarian Chamber] E 23 (Litt. ad Cam. Scep.) August 5, 1671, January 16, 1672; on János Kinisy: MNL OL E 23 (Litt. ad Cam. Scep.) September 19, 1671, and HKA HFU RN 235 October 1671, fols 41–2.

33 Paur, *Csányi János*, 23; H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?” 133–34.

34 H. Németh, “Polgár vagy nemes,” 88.

35 Házi, *Soproni polgársaládok*, No. 4429, 10710.

36 Ibid., No. 3310; Dávid, *Sopron behárolásának házai és háztulajdonosai*; MNL OL Kincstári Levéltárak, Magyar Kamara Regisztratúrája [Archives of the Treasury, Registratura of the Hungarian Chamber] E 41 (Litterae ad cameram exaratae) 1680, no. 121.



### *A New Leading Urban Elite?*

By the last decades of the seventeenth century the election commissioners had come to hold in deep contempt the practice of their predecessors of replacing trained and qualified Lutherans on the inner city councils with unqualified Catholics. In the assessment of the commissioners who came to the cities towards the end of the seventeenth century, these people, the majority of whom were decidedly unqualified, did nothing to improve life in the cities. On the contrary, because of their ignorance of public affairs they did considerable harm to the city and the management of finances.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the city of Sopron, Georg Waxman, a soap maker and also the first Catholic to serve on the city council, constitutes a paradigmatic example. He was granted the status of burgess only in 1671, and had owned no property in the city prior to this. In spite of the fact that even the cameralistic commissioners themselves reported that Waxman was a “*homo scripturae ignarus*,” in other words someone who was unable to write, they nonetheless nominated him for the position of magistrate and mayor (though he was never chosen for either post). He was once even forced to resign because of his unsuitability for the position, a clear sign of his lack of qualifications. In spite of his basic incompetence, he was nevertheless entrusted with the financial affairs and statements of account of the city for six years, even though the commissioners may well have realized the risks of doing this. In subsequent years they were compelled to continue to push Waxman into the forefront of public affairs because there were so few Catholics suitable for such roles in the city that they sooner supported him than the other, generally uneducated Catholics of Sopron, most of whom earned their livelihoods as artisans and tradesmen.<sup>38</sup> One comes across similar cases in other cities. In the case of the cities of northern Hungary, for instance, in 1677 the cameralistic administration of the Szepes region (or Spiš by its Slovak name) reported to the monarch that it had had to overcome considerable difficulties in its efforts to help Catholic senators first obtain the status of burgess and then become members of the council, due primarily to their lack of education.<sup>39</sup> These problems, however, were transitional. The measures that were adopted and the efforts that were made according to the reports of the cameralistic commissioners suggest that after the initial difficulties had been overcome genuinely qualified people

37 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?” 134.

38 Ibid. 134–35; Házi, *Soproni polgársaládok*, no. 11239; Heimler, *Payr György és Payr Mihály krónikája*, 74.

39 MNL OL E 23 (Litt. cam. Scep.) April 21, 1677.

were elected to the important city offices, and when someone was found to be unqualified, he was dismissed.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century significant changes took place among the Catholic municipal leaders as well. The commissioners managed to solve the problem that stemmed from a dearth of qualified individuals among the Catholic residents of the city by finding qualified Catholics for the most important positions who earlier had established a relationship with the city and were already bound by many ties to its inhabitants. As thorough studies of the individual cities reveal, these people were already held in high esteem, in part because of family ties and in part because of their social and economic connections. Some of these “half outsiders” had been officers on the large estates in the area, which were tightly bound to the cities by economic ties. Many of them had already settled permanently in the city and owned dwellings within the city walls. In general they were members of the nobility of the city (in other words people from noble families who did not pursue any occupation)<sup>40</sup> who had belonged to the one-time economic elite. It was common for their progeny to remain among the leaders of the city, either in the service of the state in the case of sons or as the wives of civil servants in the case of daughters.<sup>41</sup> However, as Hungarians, some of the members of the nobility who had thus come to positions of power did not have the necessary knowledge of languages, and this complicated and hampered their advancement in the cities, most of which were run by German speakers. They too belonged to the nobility and the elite that had knowledge of law and jurisprudence, as indicated, for instance, by the fact that their sons generally also completed university studies and their reports offer testimony of their knowledge of the law.<sup>42</sup>

From the perspective of the changes that took place in city politics and the efforts that were undertaken to re-Catholicize the urban communities, the best candidates were naturally people who belonged to the older generations of urban inhabitants who had achieved the status of burgess but who also had the necessary qualifications and, of course, belonged to the Catholic Church. Even in this period there were some such people in the cities, a fact that indicates the

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40 H. Németh, “Polgár vagy nemes,” 86–96; H. Németh, “Šľachta v mestách.”

41 In the case of the city of Sopron Mathias Preiner offers a paradigmatic example: Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, no. 1627; Vissi et al., *Libri Regii – Királyi Könyvek*, 28.79., 30.147.

42 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálói vagy a város képviselői?” 135.

effects of earlier efforts to reassert Catholicism in Hungary.<sup>43</sup> In some cases their place of birth was the city in which they later filled important positions, but in others they were immigrants from predominantly Catholic provinces. One might well ask whether they had perhaps made earlier attempts to acquire positions of influence in municipal offices but had failed precisely because they were Catholic, but the available sources yield no answer to this question. Their circumstances improved dramatically as they came to understand that their abilities and the recognition they enjoyed among the people of the city made them invaluable to the cameralistic commissioners, who were charged with the task of finding Catholics suitable for positions in municipal affairs. The sources suggest that they took advantage of the circumstances in their struggles against one another as well. If an election did not turn out as they had hoped it would, they would attempt to intimidate the commissioner, who found himself in a precarious position, by threatening to resign. According to the commissioners' reports, it was almost impossible to replace such people without putting unqualified and unsuitable artisans in the positions they would have left vacant.<sup>44</sup>

Some of these Catholics were relatives of some of the more important Lutheran families of the cities. Mihály Kersnarits, a Catholic who played a prominent role as one of the leaders of the city (for many years he served either as mayor or magistrate), was related through his step-mother to the Artner and Dobner families, two influential families in the Lutheran community. For the commissioners, he was a trustworthy Catholic who enjoyed widespread recognition among the people of the city, in other words an ideal leader in the municipal government and someone on whose behalf even the civil servants of the treasury used their influence. Under the system that had evolved, these people rose to fill prominent positions alongside their Lutheran counterparts, winning the local elections either with only a small minority voting against them or by unanimous consent, something that was remarkable to say the least in the cities, in which Lutherans still constituted a majority.<sup>45</sup> Often a Catholic who was

43 On re-Catholicization in the cities see H. Németh, "Európska doktrína"; Béla Vilmos Mihalik, "A Szepesi Kamara szerepe az 1670–1674 közötti felső-magyarországi rekatolizációban" [The Role of the Chamber of Szepes in the Reestablishment of Catholicism in Upper Hungary in 1670–1674], *Fons* 17 (2010): 255–320; Zsófia Kádár, "A soproni jezsuita kollégium kezdetei (1636–1640): Dobronoki György SJ superiorisége" [The Beginnings of the Jesuit College of Sopron (1636–1640): Superior General György Dobronoki], *Soproni Szemle* 65 (2011): 381–402, 66 (2012): 54–70.

44 H. Németh, "Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?" 136–37.

45 Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, No. 2395.; MNL OL E 34 (prot. rest. civ.) pag. 96, 230, 242, 272, 400–1, 490.

also part of the local intelligentsia became a family member not of one of the leading families of the city, but rather of one of the civil servants of the local treasury. These were people who had the status of burgesses and were part of the civic life of the city, but who also became part of the public administration thanks to their relationships with state officers. This gave them many advantages, of course, since as burgesses and members of the elite and the intelligentsia (primarily people with training as physicians and apothecaries) they were esteemed members of the community. And naturally their close ties to the representatives of state power clearly put them in a favorable position. If they happened to be dissatisfied with their circumstances, they immediately could profit from their relatives' relationships with people in positions of power and could turn with their complaints directly to the Hungarian chancellery, which functioned as the highest forum for interchange between the monarch and his subjects.<sup>46</sup> With the help of the cameralistic commissioners educated Catholic burgesses were able to secure positions as notaries, councilors, and even magistrates and mayors if they had moved to cities where the process of re-Catholicization had already taken place. Of the cities of the Hungarian Kingdom, Eisenstadt (Kismarton by its Hungarian name) and Rust (Ruszt), which earlier had been part of Lower Austria, were perhaps the first two places where according to the election commissioners the population was entirely Catholic.<sup>47</sup>

These examples cast light on how only some of the Catholics who came to displace the Lutheran elite were actually unsuitable for the positions for which they had been selected by the treasury or the cameralistic commissioners. In the first phase of the introduction of the measures regarding city politics in the last third of the seventeenth century a great number of people did indeed rise to positions of prominence in the municipal administration, either as city leaders or members of the inner council, who were essentially strangers to the city. They were primarily civil servants of the treasury, but given their earlier responsibilities they could be considered qualified to tend to the tasks of administration. At the time, there were many Catholics in the high-level offices of the municipal governments who had very little competence in the affairs of civic governance. By the end of the century, most of them had lost their positions, but in some cases they remained the best (Catholic) candidates for the job, given the dearth of qualified Catholic burgesses. By the last two decades of the century there

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46 H. Németh, "Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői?" 136–37.

47 Ibid., 137.

were some Catholic burgesses who had the necessary qualifications, though not many. They rose to positions of importance as individuals with the appropriate social status and background who from the perspective of their family relations had something of a dual identity: they had become relatives of the leading burgess families as people occupying state offices. Thus they can be considered the predecessors of the new leading municipal elite that began to come to power in the beginning of the eighteenth century, and eventually the forerunners (from the perspective of their attitudes) of the so-called “*honorácior*” class of the nineteenth century. The latter played a prominent role in the spread of the burgess class and lifestyle in Hungary. Thus the processes under discussion here and in the subsequent section of this essay can be seen as important initial steps in the rise of a middle (bourgeois) class in Hungary.<sup>48</sup>

### *New Tendencies in City Politics at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*

The changes that took place over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thus played an important role in the virtual transformation over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of municipal officers into officers of the centralized state. Their family relations linked them not only to the burgesses of the cities, but also to members of this elite working in other offices of the state. They thereby strengthened the “*honorácior*” intelligentsia, which was emerging as an increasingly unified modern social group founded on technical and bureaucratic expertise. In the case of the urban elite that rose to power at the end of the seventeenth century, these tendencies grew stronger and incorporated new elements. Intervention into municipal affairs by the state altered the political relationships. A Catholic with the necessary knowledge and skills was increasingly valued, particularly if he nurtured political ambitions. This had been the state of affairs for some two decades by the time Catholics obtained offices in the treasury.<sup>49</sup> Since the centralized state was coming to regard the municipal officers more as agents of its own interests, this expectation played a

48 Károly Vörös, “A modern értelmiség kezdetei Magyarországon” [The Beginnings of the Modern Intelligentsia in Hungary], *Valóság* 18, no. 10 (1975): 1–20; Domokos Kosáry, “Értelmiség és kulturális elit a XVIII. századi Magyarországon” [Intellectual and Cultural Elite in Eighteenth-Century Hungary], in D. Kosáry, *A történelem veszedelmei. Írások Európáról és Magyarországról* [The Vicissitudes of History: Essays on Europe and Hungary] (Budapest: Magvető, 1987), 138–59; Árpád Tóth, “Hivatali szakszerűsödés és a rendi minták követése. Pest város tisztviselői a reformkorban” [Bureaucratic Specialization and the Imitation of Feudal Models], *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából* 25 (1996): 27–60.

49 HKA HFU RN 157, February 1638, fols 194–9, 235; RN 222, August 1666, fols 248–88.

considerable role in the conversion of many of the city burgesses to Catholicism. Undoubtedly from the perspective of the commissioners, who had very little choice when it came to Catholic candidates for public office with the necessary qualifications, this represented a considerable change for the better, and the burgesses who converted were easily able to obtain positions of influence. In the initial stages, however, members of the Lutheran elite were reluctant to convert.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, there were counterexamples. In the second half of the seventeenth century, fearing the influence of the city magistrate, Hans Weber of Eperjes (Prešov by its Slovak name, and Preschau in German) converted to Catholicism, for instance.<sup>51</sup> The only other example one can mention with all certainty is that of Leopold Natl of Sopron, but he only converted at the age of sixty-two (in 1692), when he had already achieved essentially everything that a citizen of the city could have hoped to achieve at the time. He served for years as the leader of the municipal council of Sopron. In 1685 he was given the rank of baron in recognition of his services to the state and county as mayor, magistrate, and noble burgess, and in 1689 he was made a Knight of the Golden Spur.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, among the municipal officers who were becoming councilors at the beginning of the eighteenth century there were proportionally far more recently converted Catholics whose parents had been Lutherans and in some cases even Lutheran pastors. Their family relations brought them into close contact with and even made them part of the Lutheran elite of the city, but—and this is a sign of the importance of conversion—of the people who belonged to families who earlier had enjoyed significant influence, only those who had converted managed to attain positions of importance in municipal affairs.<sup>53</sup> As they progressed in their careers, they were able to count on the support of the cameralistic commissioners and even the most important high offices of the

50 István H. Németh, “A bezárkózó polgároktól a feljelentőkhig: állami várospolitika – széthulló rendi város?” [From Reticent Burgess to Informant: State Urban Policy – the Disintegrating Feudal City], *Lévéltári Közlemények* 82 (2011): 124–45.

51 Orsolya Bubryák, “Egy polgári mecénás a 17. században. Weber János eperjesi főbíró (1612–1684)” [A Burgess Patron in the Seventeenth Century. János Weber, Magistrate of Eperjes], *Ars Hungarica* 31 (2003): 225–80; Holda Hauke, “Die Bürgermeister der Doppelstadt Krems-Stein um die Zeit des Dreissigjährigen Krieges” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1964), 7–20; Christian Plath, *Konfessionskampf und fremde Besatzung. Stadt und Hochstift Hildesheim im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation und des Dreissigjährigen Krieges (ca. 1580–1660)* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005), 454–63; Jörg Deventer, “Die politische Führungsschicht der Stadt Schweidnitz in der Zeit der Gegenreformation,” *Jahrbuch für schlesische Kirchengeschichte* 76/77 (1997/1998): 42–49.

52 Hádi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, no. 2011, 8236; Vissi et al., *Libri Regii – Királyi Könyvek*, 18.172.

53 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgálai vagy a város képviselői?” 138–41.



country. Leopold Kampel of Sopron, for instance, had the support of palatine Pál Esterházy.<sup>54</sup> With the assistance of Leopold Karl von Kollonich, bishop of Wiener Neustadt, Friedrich Weber (the son of Hans Weber of Eperjes) attained the position of notary of Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica in Slovak, Neusohl in German).<sup>55</sup> István Kőszegi of Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) submitted a request to Leopold I (acting as if he considered himself an officer in direct contact with the monarch) in which he asked to be appointed municipal attorney.<sup>56</sup>

One discerns traces, in the first decades of the eighteenth century, of a tendency among the members of the municipal elite in Hungary that was widespread across Europe. Education and in particular knowledge of law and economics played an important role in the selection of municipal leaders. As a kind of antecedent to this, one notes that over the course of the seventeenth century schooling was an increasingly significant factor in the selection of candidates for positions in government office in nearby Vienna. A decree issued in Vienna in 1656 offers clear evidence of the rise in the importance of the education of an officer. According to the decree, only someone with significant education could be a member of the city council. Indeed gradually education came to be a more important factor than property. Between 1671 and 1705 half of the councilors in Vienna enrolled in one of the universities, and almost all of them were lawyers.<sup>57</sup> In the cities of the Holy Roman Empire this tendency had become widespread much sooner. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, lawyers in the German cities played a far more important role than they once had. They also made up an ever larger proportion of the inner councils. At the beginning of the seventeenth century most of the members of the council of the city of Frankfurt were lawyers. As of 1669 only a trained lawyer could serve as mayor.<sup>58</sup> In the eighteenth century in most of the Habsburg provinces one could

54 Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, no. 2010; MNL Győr-Moson-Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára, Sopron szabad királyi város levéltára [The Sopron Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Archives of the Free Royal City of Sopron] (SVL) Lad. III, Fasc. 1, no. 3.

55 Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pobočka Banská Bystrica, Magistrat Mesta Banskej Bystrici [State Archives of Besztercebánya, Besztercebánya Branch], Spisy Fasc. 116, no. 21–22. Nagyszombat, February 21, 1675; Protokolly 124, January 1, 1675.

56 Archív Hlavného Mesta Bratislavy, Spisový materiál [Archives of Bratislava] Lad. 36, no. 46/b.

57 Erwin Skoda, “Die Wiener Ratsbürger zwischen 1671 und 1705” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1974), 110–11.

58 Brunner, “Souveränitätsproblem und Sozialstruktur,” 347–55; Gerhard Dilcher, “‘Hell, verständig, für die Gegenwart sorgend, die Zukunft bedenkend’. Zur Stellung und Rolle der mittelalterlichen deutschen Stadtrechte in einer europäischen Rechtsgeschichte,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung* 106 (1989): 39–43; Karl Czok, “Zu den städtischen Volksbewegungen in deutschen

not obtain the position of councilor without having passed a local test in law or completed university studies, and candidates also had to complete a preliminary exam that had to be submitted to the central government authorities.<sup>59</sup>

In the latter half of the seventeenth century many of the Lutheran city elite in Hungary also had some education or even a doctorate in law. At the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and for the first two decades of the eighteenth century this tendency grew more and more pronounced, in part because of the expectations of the centralized state. At the time almost every member of the Lutheran elite had had some education in law and was active as a lawyer or jurist.<sup>60</sup>



Figure 4. Ferdinand Dobner, the Lutheran mayor of Sopron wearing the necklace received from Leopold I.  
Source: Nineteenth-century copy, Museum of Sopron

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Territorialstaaten vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Die Städte Mitteleuropas im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Städte Mitteleuropas 5 (Linz/Donau: Österreichischer Arbeitskreis für Stadtgeschichtsforschung, 1981), 31–33; Giorgio Chittolini, “Lo stato e i dottori. XV–XVIII secolo,” *Ricerche Storiche* 19 (1989): 483–610; Gerd Kleinheyer and Jan Schröder, *Deutsche Juristen aus fünf Jahrhunderten. Eine biographische Einführung in die Geschichte der Rechtswissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Müller, Jur. Verl., 1989); Sigrid Jahns, “Juristenkarrieren in der frühen Neuzeit,” *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 131 (1995): 113–34.

59 Wolf-Ulrich Rapp, *Stadtverfassung und Territorialverfassung. Koblenz und Trier unter Kurfürst Clemens Wenzeslaus (1768–1794)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995), 48–51; Rügge, *Im Dienst von Stadt und Staat*.

60 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői?” 139–41.

The commissioners only took Catholics who had the necessary qualifications into consideration. By the early eighteenth century there were still not enough such Catholics to meet the demand, so the commissioners sought out servants of the treasury or a landowner who were acceptable to the inhabitants of the city. The political circumstances at the time no longer favored the commissioners (who represented the cities, the state and the monarch) as they once had. One comes across indications in the available sources of concerted resistance, and if a commissioner hoped to arrive at a long-term solution, he was compelled to take the desires of the (for the most part Lutheran) people of the city into consideration and make compromises. The Lutherans accepted the practice of allowing only a Catholic to replace a Catholic on the council, but only if the candidate had already been given the status of burgess at the time of his selection and had already had ties to the freemen of the city. In general the people who were selected for such roles were members of the propertied nobility of the region who had settled in the cities,<sup>61</sup> or when it was simply impossible to find a suitable burgess of the city, the commissioners would nominate some civil servant of the treasury. But even in such cases they strove to find someone who was related in some way to the members of the city elite (and they sought Catholics first and foremost, of course). Sometimes they would choose an officer who had married the widow of a servant of the treasury who had been chosen for want of a better candidate.<sup>62</sup> Their offspring in general would be able to continue in their parents' footsteps as denizens of the city invested with the full rights of the burgess class and as the children of families of civil servants and intellectuals, and the members of the next generation were able to assume many of the most important positions in the city. They had far more familial ties to the new leading Catholic elite. The children of Catholic municipal leaders very often intermarried, thereby strengthening their positions through the creation of a strong network of family and economic links. As the steward of the estates of the bishop of Rákos, Johann Michael Schilson, for instance, was made a member of the inner council of Sopron by the order of the monarch. As a member of the council, he married the daughter of Mihály Kersnarits, who served many times both as mayor and magistrate.<sup>63</sup> Qualified converts who as Lutherans had acquired knowledge of administration and who, because of their family

61 Ibid., 140.

62 Ibid., 140–41; MNL OL E 34 (Prot. rest. civ.) 403–5; SVL Lad. XXXVIII. et NN fasc. 1, no. 8.

63 Ibid., 141; Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, no. 908, 5772, 9510, 11240; SVL Lad. XXXVIII. et NN Fasc. 1, no. 21; lad. III, fasc. 1, no. 3.

ties, can be seen as elite members of the urban community were also able to become members of the municipal council.<sup>64</sup> As of the end of the seventeenth century, the Catholic members of the city elite began to become a part of the old city elite, as indicated both by the relationships they began to establish with other families of the city and their acquisition of dwellings within the city walls. Those who came into possession of properties in the inner cities already had completed university studies in law and administration and therefore were able to join the municipal leaders as trained city officers. They tended to purchase homes in the innermost quarters of the city and as close as possible to the main squares, where the town hall was located.<sup>65</sup>

In some cases Catholics were able to take advantage of the available opportunities and launch what turned out to be impressive careers. Some of the officers and intellectuals who arrived from other areas were given opportunities in new places. In these cases, however, we are dealing with the development of individual intellectual-elite families. According to the cameralistic commissioners, Georg Waxman, the aforementioned soap maker, was almost illiterate. His sons, however, were not. Their father was able to learn from his own shortcomings and therefore ensured that each of his two sons receive some education. His older son, also Georg, thus became the city notary and in 1722 a member of the inner council, then magistrate for two years, and in 1734 he became mayor. While the elder Waxman was related to the burgesses of Sopron by marriage, his son Georg took another path. His first wife was not the child of one of the burgess families of the city, but his second wife was the widow of Johann Strauss, the son of Sopron custom-house officer Mathias Strauss. In other words the younger Georg set his sights on the “honorácior” circle of the city elite, a class that held state office and owned property in the city. A further indication of this was his decision to allow his daughter to marry Ferenc Petrák, the son of former mayor János Petrák and a man who was also pursuing a career in state affairs. With the help of a municipal foundation, Ferenc Petrák completed his university studies and later became a member of the inner council and then served as mayor and magistrate.<sup>66</sup> His other son, Johann Georg, completed his studies in law with the assistance of this foundation and earned his livelihood as an attorney. He was not able to become a member of the council in Sopron,

64 H. Németh, “Az állam szolgái vagy a város képviselői?” 141.

65 Dávid, *Sopron belvárosának házai és háztulajdonosai*.

66 Házi, *Soproni polgárcsaládok*, no. 908, 11240.

but in the nearby city of Rust (Ruszt) he served as notary and council member.<sup>67</sup> At the beginning of his career the elder Waxman owned only a house in the part of the city lying outside the city walls. In 1699 he purchased a home across from the Church of Saint George, in other words in one of the important parts of the city, which he later left to his older son. In the meantime, in 1719, as his career progressed, his older son was able to purchase a house on the main square of the city in close proximity to the town hall.<sup>68</sup> The Waxman family of Sopron offers a clear example of how state intervention in municipal affairs at the end of the seventeenth century created opportunities for families that in earlier times would have faced considerable difficulties had they attempted to become part of the municipal political leadership or the intellectual elite. For them, the changes that were introduced in municipal affairs constituted advantages and opportunities for social advancement, making it easier for them to become part of the increasingly influential circle of officers and intellectuals and later the so-called “*honorácior*” class of civil servants.

### *Conclusion*

At the beginning of this essay I raised the following two questions: was it the goal of the central government to develop well-trained, bureaucratic municipal administrations that resembled the administrative municipal bodies in other parts of Europe, and if so, did the central government succeed in this goal? As the cases presented above clearly demonstrate, the answer to both questions is yes. While at the end of the seventeenth century, in its efforts to reassert Catholicism in the cities the centralized state found itself compelled, given the dearth of qualified or educated Catholics, to select people for positions in the municipal councils who lacked the appropriate training, with the passing of a single generation fundamental changes took place. The people who were in positions of power at the time, both Lutherans and Catholics, had an education in law and economics, for the most part were bound to the community by strong family ties and owned property in parts of the city that were important from the perspective of municipal affairs. The emergence of this social group (or class) and the assumption by its members of positions in municipal leadership ushered in a new era, the era of the emergence of a new social layer of bureaucrats and

67 Ibid., no. 11240, 11241. His petition: SVL Lad. III. Fasc. 1, no. 46.

68 Dávid, *Sopron behárosának házai és háztulajdonosai*, 45.

intellectuals, also the era of the rise of the middle class and the “honorácior” layer of civil servants. They had family ties not only to families prominent in city affairs on the local and regional level, but also to families active in the administration of the centralized state. Because of these ties, their interests played a clear role in state administration, and they defended both their personal interests and the needs of their cities, at times even in opposition to the goals and strivings of the centralized state.

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